

Kirk Amendment Authorizing Bonuses for Long-Term Service in Afghanistan Heads to Senate for Final Approval **FOR IMMEDIATE RELEASE**

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U.S. Soldiers Who Commit to At Least Three Years in Afghanistan and Speak Critical Languages Could Be Eligible for Large Bonuses;

"For the Duration" Would Improve Military Effectiveness, Boost Mission Success

WASHINGTON – U.S. Rep. Mark Kirk (R-Ill.) today applauded House passage of his legislation to authorize large bonuses for U.S. soldiers who volunteer to serve in Afghanistan for at least three years.

"Based on my recent military service in Afghanistan, I know that a small number of hard-chargers will sign up for a long commitment to the Afghan campaign," said Kirk, a Navy Reserve Intelligence Officer who deployed to Southern Afghanistan in December and January.

"Institutional knowledge is hard to come by in Afghanistan. Most NATO soldiers deploy for only six months. Nearly all American troops leave after 12 months. We need a small corps of committed troops willing to build the local long-term relationships and language skills to become expert leaders of our effort."

Based on the successes of State Department and U.S. Agency for International Development employees who remain in Afghanistan for three to four years, the Kirk Amendment allows the Secretary of Defense to offer special incentives for highly-committed enlisted personnel and officers who sign up "for the duration" – a commitment of at least three years. The language, included in the Conference Report to the National Defense Authorization Act (H.R. 2647), also places a heavy emphasis on service members who achieve proficiency in critical languages.

"Congressman Rick Larsen (D-WA) and I suggested a bonus of \$250,000 for a 'duration' commitment, with another \$250,000 if a soldier masters one of Afghanistan's two main languages -- Pashto or Dari. I know there are 100-200 soldiers who will make that commitment. They are likely to become some of NATO's most effective people in Afghanistan," said Kirk.

"Senior commanders in Afghanistan tell us that "for the duration" soldiers would become uniquely valuable assets in building trust and confidence among Afghan tribal leaders," Kirk said. "President Obama is committed to the Afghan effort and this program will make its success much more likely."

The Conference Report now heads to the Senate for final approval. The final version of the Kirk amendment is included below.

SEC. 619. ADDITIONAL ASSIGNMENT PAY OR SPECIAL DUTY PAY AUTHORIZED FOR MEMBERS AGREEING TO SERVE IN AFGHANISTAN FOR EXTENDED PERIODS.

(a) AUTHORITY TO PROVIDE ADDITIONAL ASSIGNMENT PAY OR SPECIAL DUTY PAY.—

The Secretary of Defense may provide assignment pay or special duty pay under section 352 of title 37, United States Code, in excess of the maximum amount of monthly or lump sum assignment or special duty pay authorized under subsection (b) of such section, to members of the Armed Forces (particularly members who achieve language proficiency at levels and in languages specified by the Secretary of Defense) who agree to serve on active duty in Afghanistan for a minimum of three years. The assignment period required by the agreement shall provide for reasonable periods of leave.

(b) REPORTING REQUIREMENTS.—The Secretary shall submit to Congress an annual report on the use of the authority provided under subsection (a) during the preceding year, including—

(1) the number of members of the Armed Forces receiving assignment pay or special duty pay under section 352 of title 37, United States Code, in excess of the maximum amount otherwise authorized under such section; and

(2) an assessment of the impact of the use of such authority on the effectiveness and efficiency in achieving the United States mission in Afghanistan.

(c) DURATION OF AUTHORITY.—The authority provided by subsection (a) to offer additional assignment pay or special duty pay under section 352 of title 37, United States Code, expires on December 31, 2012. The expiration of such authority shall not affect the terms or duration of any agreement entered into before that date to provide additional assignment pay or special duty pay under such section.

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